**Deputy Prime Minister's USA visit**

†2644. SHRI ABU ASIM AZMI :
PROF. M. SANKARALINGAM :

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) the details of the issues discussed and agreements reached during the recent visit of Deputy Prime Minister to USA;

(b) whether any discussion took place on issues like Iraq and Pakistan; and

(c) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) Deputy Prime Minister's visit to the United States in June 2003 provided an opportunity to discuss bilateral, regional and international issues of mutual interest. U.S. President George Bush reaffirmed his commitment to continue the process of transformation of the India-U.S. relationship. No agreement was signed during the visit.

(b) Yes.

(c) The two sides discussed Prime Minister's peace initiative towards Pakistan and the current trends in cross-border terrorism. President Bush expressed his admiration of Prime Minister's initiative and reiterated his commitment to continue to press Pakistan on taking action on cross-border terrorism. The two sides exchanged views on the political and security situation in Iraq, including the U.S. request for Indian troop deployment in Iraq. The Deputy Prime Minister conveyed India's views on the issue. He conveyed the hope that the U.S. Government would be mindful of India's security concerns in deciding on military assistance to Pakistan.

**Indo-Australian co-operation**

2645. SHRI K. NATWAR SINGH: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) whether Australia is exploring areas and issues fo closer co-operation with India;

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

(b) if so, whether both India and Australia are seen as important components of stability in the Asia-Pacific region; and

(c) if so, what are the main issues on which both India and Australia have agreed to have a closer cooperation?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) Yes.

(b) Yes.

(c) India and Australia have agreed to seek closer cooperation on political, strategic, economic and commercial issues at the bilateral, regional and international levels.

**Pakistani National as Visa Officer in British High Commission**

2646. SHRI P. PRABHAKAR REDDY: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) whether the British High Commission in New Delhi has appointed a former Pakistani National as a Visa Officer in High Commission's office;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) Government's reaction thereto and whether Government have conveyed its feelings to the British Government on the proposed appointment; and

(d) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) No.

(b) to (d) Do not arise.

**Increase in staff strength in Indian and Pakistani High Commissions**

2647. SHRI LALIT SURI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) whether in view of the resumption of diplomatic relations between India and Pakistan, the staff strength in the two High Commissions is proposed to be brought to the original level;